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Obituary on Cletus Collom

Betsy Foley

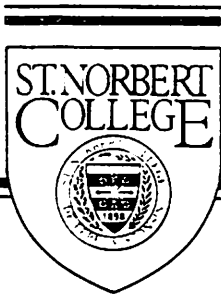
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To: Friends in the Media

From: Betsy Foley, Director of Communication and Public Relations
Telephone: 414/337-3020

March 21, 1994

Word came to me earlier this day of the death of Cletus Collom, who, it might be said, brought radio and television to Green Bay and the Fox Valley.

Collom, a St. Norbert student from Michigan, and the Rev. Francis Van Dyke, O. Praem., obtained an operating license and built the first radio station in northeastern Wisconsin in 1925. The pair set up a transmitter on the fourth floor of Boyle Hall on the St. Norbert campus and began broadcasting under the call letters WHBY on April 6, 1925.

In November 1928, the station increased power to 100 watts and opened studios in Green Bay, Appleton, and Oshkosh. The Norbertines bought WTAQ, a 1,000 watt station in Appleton, in 1935. WHBY moved to Appleton four years later as a Mutual Broadcasting System affiliate with a 5,000 watt transmitter. WTAZ, a CBS affiliate, moved to Green Bay-De Pere and became WBAY, and today operates as WIXX-WGEE.

These set the stage in 1952 for the Norbertines to build WBAY-TV, the first television station in the area.

Collom has been described as "an industrious businessman who overpowered the electronics industry during the 1940s and 1950s." After leaving St. Norbert, he founded the Weltronic Company in Detroit which provided electronic controls in resistance welding for aircraft, the automobile and other diversified industries. He is said to have developed the first walkie-talkie for the U.S. Army during World War II. He developed other businesses which used the principles of radio electronics, pioneering the use of radio frequency for industrial heating and developing radio-controlled garage door openers and amateur radio transmitters.

After he retired in 1974 in Clare, Mich., Collom stayed busy with his hobby of building and designing electrically powered automobiles.

Collom died Friday in Michigan at the age of 96 and was buried there earlier today. A grandson, Michael, lives in Green Bay.

If you need more information to develop a story on Cletus Collom, I am available to help and/or would refer you to his grandson, Michael, or the Rev. Dennis Burke, O. Praem., who was a student at St. Norbert with Collom.

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